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2021-09-15

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py Hahl , K & Keinänen , N 2021 , ' Teachers Perceptions of Using Drama- and Other Action-Based Methods in Language Education ' , Journal of Creative Practices in Language Learning and Teaching , vol. 9 , no. 2 , pp. 27-45 . < <https://cplt.uitm.edu.my/v1/images/v9n2/Article3.pdf> >

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<http://hdl.handle.net/10138/334584>

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## **Teachers' Perceptions of Using Drama- and Other Action-Based Methods in Language Education**

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Received: 23 June 2021

Accepted: 30 August 2021

Published: 15 September 2021

### **ABSTRACT**

This article examines teachers' perceptions of the use of drama- and other action-based methods in teaching a foreign or second language in Finland. Prior research reveals that much foreign language teaching is textbook-based and does not utilize the target language effectively. International research on drama- and action-based methods shows that these instructional techniques are beneficial to student learning and language acquisition. The data for this study were collected through an online questionnaire with closed and open questions and analyzed inductively with content analysis. The findings indicate that a majority of the participants (n=130) used action-based methods regularly. Teachers used these methods because they believed they improve student learning, increase motivation, and liven up lessons. However, teachers lacked training in action-based methods and some also felt there is no time for these methods in busy schedules. Using drama methods was much less common than other action-based methods, such as different word games with movement. The findings show that although textbooks provide ideas for dramatized reading of texts, teachers found most activities online or made them up themselves. Drama and other action-based methods should be incorporated into teacher education and language textbooks so that teachers would gain confidence and competence in using them and have easy access to different, even more complex activities.

**Keywords:** action-based methods, drama-based methods, foreign language education, Finland, teacher education

## INTRODUCTION

Foreign language education has gone through different periods where new methods have been introduced and new approaches developed to find ways to enable the learner to learn successfully. In recent decades, variations of the communicative approach have been emphasized in language education and focus has shifted to meaningful use of the foreign language, learner-centeredness, social interaction, and collaborative learning (Piccardo & North, 2019). Already in the last century, Cook (1997, p. 231) called for the recognition of the complexity of language learning, which is “sometimes form-focused and sometimes meaning-focused, sometimes fiction and sometimes fact.” Research reveals, however, that much foreign language teaching continues to be teacher-centered, textbook-based, and fails to utilize the target language effectively (e.g., Harjanne, Díaz Larenas, & Tella, 2017). It is argued that learner-centredness often merely translates to more pair and group work (Piccardo & North, 2019). This challenges the core ideas of learner-centeredness that is supposed to consider the unique qualities, needs, and interests of all diverse learners (van Lier, 2007).

The current Finnish national core curriculum calls for active learning and varied instruction methods that allow room for joy, creativity, physical activity, and playfulness in all education (FNBE, 2016). New teaching and learning methods are being developed as the nature of knowledge needed is changing; tomorrow’s jobs require new skills from the diversifying population, and, for example, intercultural communication and interaction skills are becoming more and more essential for everyone (FNBE, 2016). Although all Finnish students study English, the number of students studying other optional foreign languages has dropped dramatically in the last decades (Education Statistics Finland, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c). There is thus a need to make foreign language learning more engaging and meaningful and to incorporate more simulated real-life language use in the classroom.

Action-based teaching is an approach that “puts human agency in the center of attention” and focuses on “the things that learners do and say while engaged in meaningful activity” (van Lier, 2007, p. 46). Repetitions are important in studying and learning foreign languages and through engaging activities, games, playing, and other purposeful movements they become meaningful and natural (Pinter, 2017; van Lier, 2007). Using kinesthetic tasks in language learning activities with body movement and body language has been found to improve language learning (Hwang, Manabe, Cai, & Ma, 2020). Prior research on action-based methods shows that these instructional techniques are beneficial to student motivation, learning, and language acquisition (e.g., Alpar, 2013; Anderson & Berry, 2015; Galante & Thomson, 2017). However, action-based methods in language learning have been studied very little, particularly in Finland, and teachers’ perceptions of using them almost not at all. This study thus investigates language teachers’ perceptions of the use of drama- and other action-based methods in teaching a foreign or second language in Finland, including the types used, along with perceived benefits and impediments. It also gives suggestions for the inclusion of such activities in language teaching, textbook preparation, and in teacher education.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Action-based methods can be considered part of the action-oriented approach to language teaching that is supported in *The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* and that emphasizes that the learner is a social agent who is a language learner and a language user (Council of Europe, 2001; Piccardo & North, 2019). When learners are truly seen as social agents and language users, it should translate to “extensive use of the target language in the classroom—learning to use the language rather than just learning about the language (as a subject)” (Council of Europe, 2018, p. 27). The action-oriented approach is related to content-based, project-based, and task-based teaching and learning. However, as van Lier (2007, p. 46) explains, action-based teaching “makes agency, rather than the particular curricular organization, the defining construct.”

In this article, action-based language teaching and learning are understood to consist of activities that are creative, cooperative, interactive and/or kinesthetic, and utilize a combination of techniques from, for example, drama education, movement, storytelling, and visualization in order to allow the practice and rich use of language (Maunu & Airaksinen, 2020). Some scholars make clearer distinctions between drama-based instruction and other action-based methods. However, for our purposes, drama-based instruction is considered an action-based method, and we use the term “drama-based” or “drama” when it has been used by the researchers we cite. For Angelianawati (2019, p. 127), “the priority of performing drama in the language classroom is not for a show before the audiences but for facilitating the students to interact with other people and practice their store of language for communicating in a meaningful manner.” For Even, (2011, p. 304), “learners act and react spontaneously in staged situations, using not only their intellectual faculties, but also kinesthetics and body language; facial expressions, gestures, modulations of voice, movement, etc.”

### *The benefits of action-based teaching*

Language teachers are more and more faced with situations where they need to motivate and inspire students who are bored with traditional teaching methods or otherwise disengaged from the classroom. Sitting in their seats lesson after lesson has been found to demotivate students and different kinesthetic exercises have been developed to activate them. Movement helps to prepare the brain for learning new things, and it can be used for necessary breaks or transitions in lessons (Lengel & Kuczala, 2010). Movement can also help to manage the class and provide a more stimulating learning environment as learners stay more concentrated on tasks that they find engaging and fun. Using the target language in various activating real-life situations should thus be an integral aspect of language teaching (Council of Europe, 2018; FNBE, 2016).

Various drama- and action-based techniques—games, action songs, role-play, improvisation, process drama, and even rehearsal and performance of texts—can become part of an interactive and participatory pedagogy that teachers can use co-constructively to engage learners emotionally and playfully (Winston, 2011). Repetition is the base of countless children’s games and it can be exploited successfully in communication and grammar games (Pinter, 2017; van Lier, 2007). Simple repetition exercises are suitable for the beginning stages of language learning, but the full potential of action-oriented tasks is realized in tasks that require problem-

solving and decision-making skills and engage the learner on multiple levels to complete a given task (Grosu, 2019; Piccardo & North, 2019). It is important to keep in mind that foreign language learning is a long process and requires years of practice before higher levels are reached. Thus, different kinds and more and less challenging action-based tasks are necessary to provide learners with opportunities to use the language regularly and naturally from the beginning.

Previous research suggests that drama-based activities are particularly beneficial for increasing student engagement in language learning. For example, Anderson and Berry (2015) found that students with learning disabilities and attention deficit disorder in third-grade language arts classes had a higher rate of on-task behavior when using dramatic as opposed to conventional activities. The contributing factors were the greater contextualization of the language learning environment, and changes in the speech acts of teachers: in drama-based activities teachers' speech acts were more elaborative and dialogic, whereas they were more regulative with conventional activities (Anderson & Berry, 2015). Angelianawati (2019) lists heightened student engagement as a key reason for using drama activities in English as a foreign language (EFL) teaching. Many studies mention that both students and teachers find drama activities fun and enjoyable (e.g., Salas Alvarado, 2017; Sirisrimangkon, 2018).

Students have asserted that when using drama activities they are more self-confident, comfortable and more willing to speak, and not so afraid to make mistakes in the foreign language (Even, 2011; Gill, 2016). One reason for this is that students can use alternative identities in drama and, in a way, hide behind a mask (whether imagined or real) which makes them more willing to take risks in the foreign language and not feel too self-conscious (Winston, 2011). Similarly, the use of costumes has been shown to have a positive impact on learners' perceptions of their own language use, increasing their sense of competence (DeCoursey, 2014). Other studies have revealed that drama exercises helped to reduce student anxiety and increase students' confidence, motivation, and flow experience (e.g., Abenoja & DeCoursey, 2019; İşigüzel, 2020). Teachers have also found drama-based instruction to help students develop empathy (Toksun, 2017).

In addition to these affective effects, the use of drama in teaching has been found to increase students' language skills. For example, drama-based instruction can lead to improvements in foreign language oral fluency when compared to more traditional communicative EFL instruction (e.g., Galante & Thomson, 2017; Sirisrimangkorn, 2018). A small improvement in comprehensibility has also been detected (Galante & Thomson, 2017). Even (2011) found that students understood grammar more thoroughly when they were personally engaged in the activities and discourses where they listened to others, reacted to what was said, and collaboratively participated in scenes and situations to make them go forward. Studies have shown that drama activities have a positive effect on students' writing performance (Bataineh & Salah, 2017) and creative thinking (Albalawi, 2014). Some of these gains can be attributed to the nature of teachers' role(s) when using drama-based techniques, both in and out of role. Kao, Carlin and Hsu (2011) found that EFL drama activities facilitated more interactive questioning by the teacher, in contrast to traditional approaches where pseudo questions to check understanding were more frequently used. Especially for younger students, action-based methods emphasizing playing and games have been shown to improve student learning (Alpar, 2013).

*Using drama- or other action-based methods in language education*

It is recommended that a variety of action-based techniques are used, with an emphasis on bonding activities for warm-up and team-building as they create a sense of safety for students. More structured activities, including process drama, are recommended for creating debate and discussion (Reed & Seong, 2013). Action-based warm-up activities are effective when introducing a new topic or theme in class (Maunu & Airaksinen, 2020). Action-based methods give more autonomy and decision-making power to students, which enables them to practice and develop their cooperation and teamwork skills in interactive tasks or projects (Grosu, 2019).

To date, there has been little research on teachers' attitudes towards using action-based methods in language teaching. However, especially in Turkey, several studies have been conducted with pre-service teachers in relation to drama-based methods. Baykal, Saym and Zeybek (2019) report that English language pre-service teachers in Turkey found a course in using drama valuable, had mainly positive views of using drama in language teaching, and anticipated using drama in their own teaching. Doğan and Cephe (2018) found that student teachers in a 30-hour creative drama workshop, part of an English language training program, improved their teaching skills, and had very positive perceptions of using drama in language teaching. Köksal's (2020) study of Turkish pre-service teachers on the role of the body in drama class revealed that drama activities made their own learning more permanent and contributed to a fun and relaxing atmosphere. Kosucu and Hursen (2017) found that creative drama activities increased the self-directed skills of Cypriot pre-service teachers who enjoyed using the techniques.

Several researchers comment on the need for training to help practicing teachers learn action-based teaching skills. After training, teachers have become more aware of the benefits of using drama techniques to improve their students' speaking skills (Hişmanoğlu & Çolak, 2019), gained competence in using drama activities in teaching (Toksun, 2017), and improved their self-efficacy in teaching (Aykaç, 2017). Self-efficacy and comfort with drama activities take time to develop and teachers need on-going support to gain experience in implementing these methods (Stanton, Cawthon, & Dawson, 2018).

Only a few studies have examined how teachers use action-based methods in teaching. In Turkey, teachers used drama activities mostly as warm-up or wrap-up exercises, though they also used various kinds of texts as prompts for drama-based activities (Toksun, 2017). During their teaching practice, Malaysian pre-service teachers used games, action songs, and role-plays to promote learners' active participation in class, but adopted a structural approach when teaching accuracy and grammar (Othman & Kiely, 2016). Teachers in early language teaching in Finland used action-based methods—such as games and playing, songs and music—to inspire learners and keep them concentrated on tasks (Hahl, Savijärvi, & Wallinheimo, 2020).

Given the previously stated aims of the Finnish national curriculum to move towards active learning methods that engage the whole student, affectively as well as intellectually (FNBE, 2016), and the lack of previous research on teachers' use of action-based teaching methods, we set the following research questions:

1. How do foreign language teachers in Finland define drama- and other action-based techniques?

2. How frequently do teachers use these techniques, and which drama- and other action-based techniques do they use the most?
3. What do teachers perceive as the benefits and impediments to the use of these techniques?
4. Where do teachers get ideas for these activities?

## CONTEXT AND METHOD

In this section, we first describe the context of this study and then give details on the method of the study, including data collection and analysis, and information about the participants. In Finland, students study at least one foreign language (most often English by choice or by the lack of options) and the second national language (Swedish in Finnish-speaking schools) in comprehensive schools (Grades 1–9) and upper secondary school. They can study other optional languages, starting in Grade 4 or 5, Grade 8 or in upper secondary school, if the school offers such options and if the minimum number of students enroll. In 2019, only 14.7% of sixth graders and 19.3% of ninth graders in Finland studied another language besides English and Swedish (Education Statistics Finland, 2020a, 2020b). In upper secondary education in 2017, 21.8% of Finnish students had completed the studies for an additional language besides English and Swedish (Education Statistics Finland, 2020c). Usually, there are two 45-minute weekly lessons of a foreign language in grades 3–9 (one in grades 1–2, only from 2020 on). In upper secondary school, subjects are taught as courses which include three 75-minute weekly lessons for about seven weeks. There are 2–3 courses per language each year.

### *Data collection and analysis*

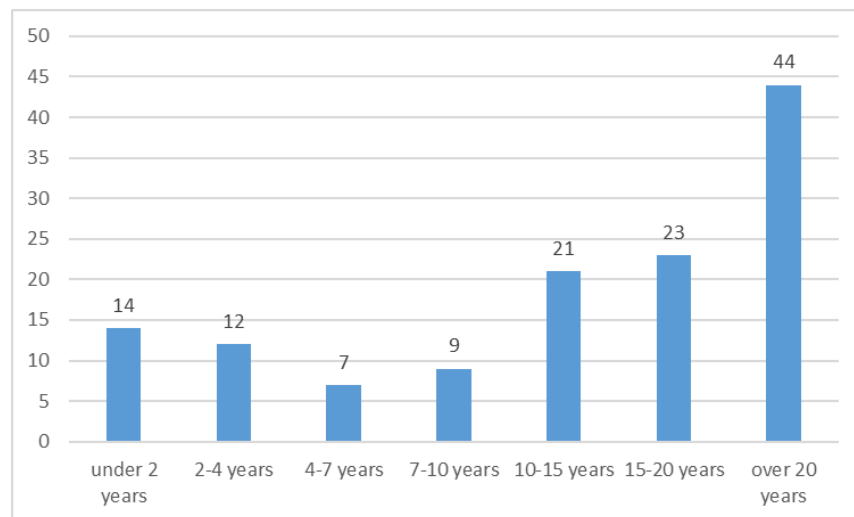
The data for this study were collected through an online questionnaire that was distributed in language teacher networks on social media and through language teacher associations' email lists. The questionnaire had 19 questions, some of which were displayed based on the respondent's earlier response. The questionnaire started with multiple-choice background questions (such as teaching experience and taught languages). It continued with questions about the use of action-based language teaching methods (e.g., what activities were used and at what frequency, reasons for using or not using); and how the respondents in fact defined drama- or other action-based methods. Some of these questions had a yes/no question (e.g., *Do you use drama- or action-based methods in teaching regularly?*) before displaying a follow-up question (e.g., after Yes: *Please tell us why you use these methods in teaching regularly. Tell us also what "regularly" to you is*). The questionnaire was piloted before the distribution and changes were made to ensure it was as neutral as possible, for example, by avoiding the implicit assumption that teachers ought to be using these techniques and would need to defend *not* using them. We decided not to make clear distinctions between drama- and other action-based activities, as we did not want to assume that teachers can distinguish between them and we wanted to know how they in fact understand these methods.

The data were analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively with content analysis using an inductive approach (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007), with the Atlas.ti program. The data from the open-ended questions were read through multiple times by both authors and repetitive content (e.g., types of activities) was coded with categories raised from the data. The categories were merged into fewer categories with successive readings and rounds of analysis to abstract the data. This was done by collecting together the disparate ways of explaining the same or similar thing

under larger labels. The final categories are shown in the findings. Descriptive statistics are used to visualize some of the data, and direct quotes (translated by the authors) are used to add credibility to the findings (Cohen et al., 2007).

#### *Background of the participants*

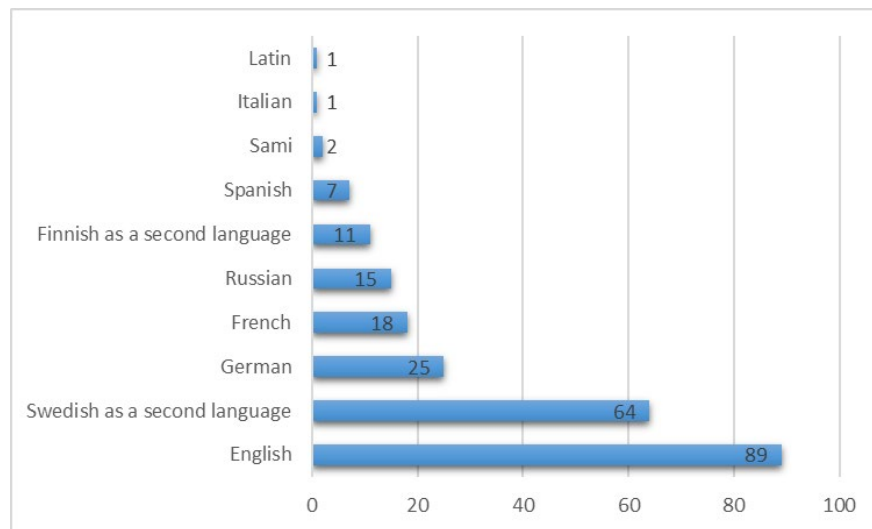
Altogether 130 responses were received from teachers, with teaching experience ranging from under two years to over 20 years. About a third of the respondents had at least 20 years of language teaching experience (Figure 1).



*Figure 1: The number of respondents and their respective teaching experience in years.*

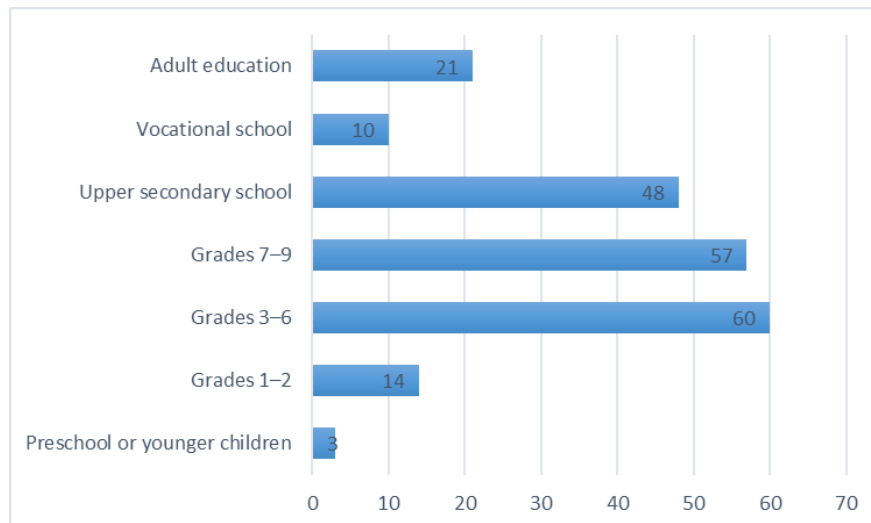
All language teachers in Finland have a Master's degree. The respondents taught a variety of different languages, many of them two, some even three different languages (Figure 2). Most of the teachers taught English (37%). Swedish as a second language was the second most common language (29%), with German (12%), French (7%), Russian (5.7%), Finnish as a second language (4 %) and Spanish (2.7%) following. In addition, there was one teacher for Italian, Latin and Japanese, and two teachers teaching different Sami languages.





*Figure 2: The spread of different languages taught by the respondents.*

The majority of the respondents taught at the elementary, lower secondary, and upper secondary levels of education but there were also respondents from preschool, vocational school, and adult education (Figure 3). Many teachers taught at more than one level.



*Figure 3: School level of the respondents. Many teachers taught at two or even three levels.*

The respondents were from different parts of Finland and represented all but two provinces (17 out of 19). The aim of this study was not to find generalizable results; the respondents were too few and it can be assumed that the majority of them were teachers who are interested in more engaging teaching methods to even respond to such a questionnaire.

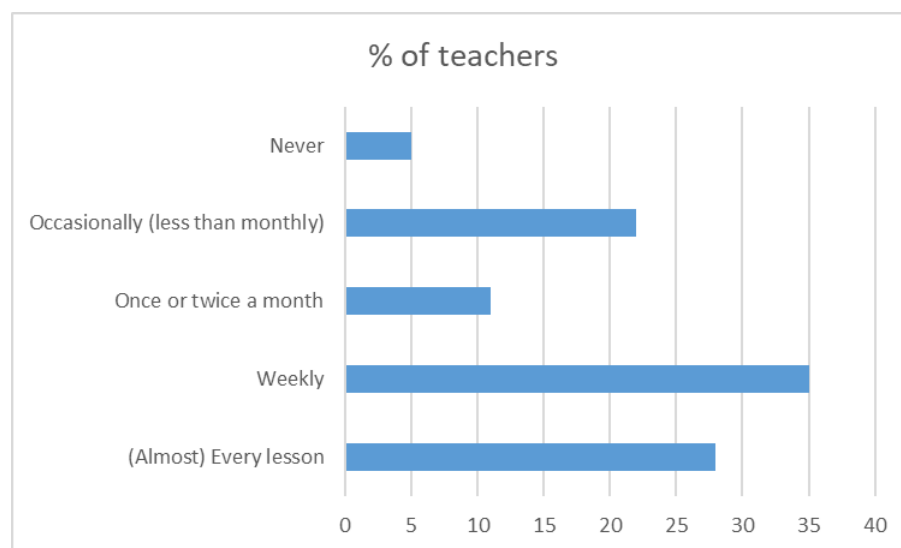
## FINDINGS

In this section, we will address the findings in the order of the research questions. First we explain how foreign language teachers defined drama- and other action-based techniques and how frequently they used them. Then we will show what techniques they used more frequently and what benefits or impediments they found to their use. We will end with a review of the sources for ideas for these methods.

### *Teachers' definitions and frequency of use of action-based methods*

The respondents defined drama- and action-based activities in different ways but, in general, the most common denominator was learning by doing and activities that combine language with some action. About a third of the respondents specified that such activities must include movement to be considered action-based. Some respondents believed that action-based activities did not necessarily have to involve movement but could be such simple activities as dramatized reading of textbook chapters or interactive group work. Many respondents in fact described that they have their students perform dialogues (often from the textbook) in pairs, several of them specifying that it had to be done by immersing oneself in the role.

Almost all the respondents said that they had used drama- or other action-based activities in teaching (124 out of 130) and of these 96 (77%) said that they use them regularly. There was no clear difference between teachers with different number of years of teaching experience. "Regularly," however, meant different frequency for different teachers but the majority used them at least weekly with each student group (Figure 4).



*Figure 4: Frequency of use of drama- and action-based methods by the respondents.*

The findings thus suggest that the respondents were a selected group of language teachers who use action-based methods as an integral part of their language teaching. However, using actual drama methods was much less common than other action-based methods. Out of the respondents, 30% (n=39) had had their students create a process drama (e.g., a drama created by students in

order to learn about a given topic), 18% (n=24) had had their students perform a ready-made play, while only 12% (n=15) had had their students adapt a literary work into a play. None of these drama methods were within the most-used activities, as seen in the next section.

### *Types of action-based language teaching methods*

The respondents were asked to describe three to five of their most-used activities, and Figure 5 shows how we classified them. The most common type of activity was different word games with movement. These included word games for individual words, sentences or word structures and all had some type of activity of body movement attached. In addition to these activities that were classified in this group, there were other word games with movement that were so popular that they were categorized separately into “running dictation,” “flyswatter,” and “fruit salad.” The second most popular activity was role-play. Role-play was particularly popular in adult education for simulations of real-life encounters, but it was also used at other levels. The use of different dramatic texts or sketches was as popular as having students carry out dialogues or question-and-answer sessions in pairs. Word games (without movement) included such activities as Alias or Pictionary. Using pantomime for guessing words or actions was also used quite often. Action songs or singing were mentioned by only nine respondents and out-of-classroom learning by five.

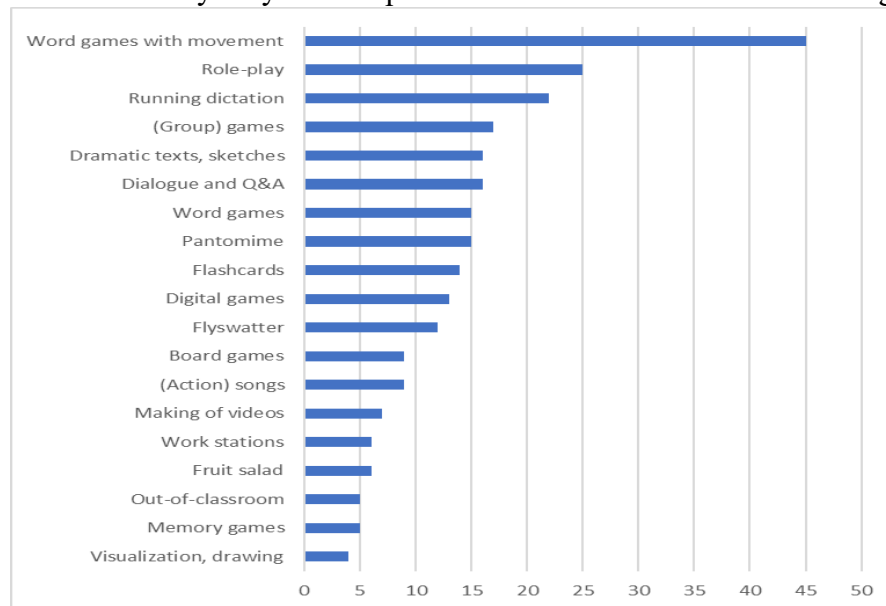
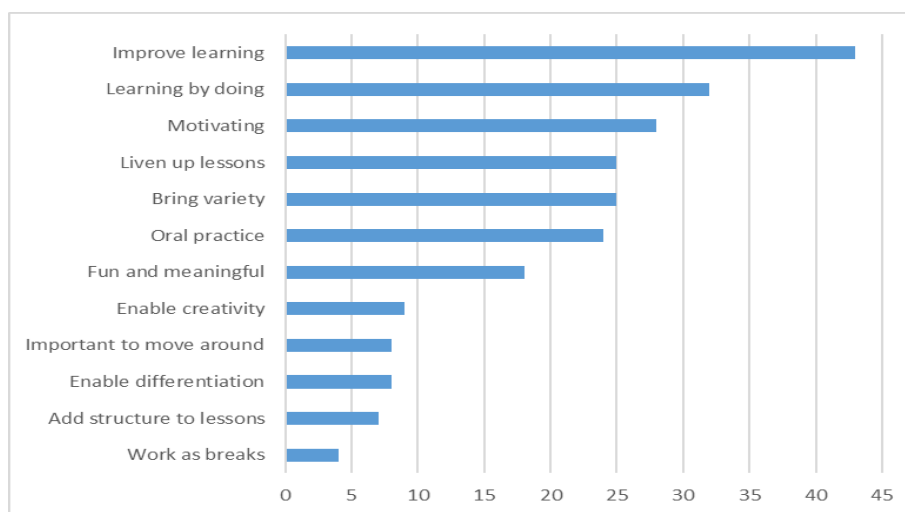


Figure 5: Different action-based activities most used by the respondents.

In the next sections, we will first detail the benefits that teachers described of using action-based methods in teaching and, secondly, the factors they mentioned which prevented them from using these techniques (often).

### *Benefits of using action-based methods in teaching*

The respondents who used drama- or other action-based methods regularly were also asked to specify the reasons why using them is beneficial in language teaching. These reasons are grouped into the categories shown in Figure 6 based on their frequency in the teachers' answers.



*Figure 6: Reasons given for using action-based methods in teaching, shown by the frequency in responses.*

The most common reason for using drama- and other action-based methods in language teaching mentioned by the respondents was that they improve student learning (n=43, 45% of regular users) and support different types of learners:

Every lesson has something action-based. In this way, lessons become more varied, which increases students' motivation, makes learning and studying pleasant and thus makes learning easier. Not all students learn the same way so all learners must be given a chance to learn in their own way. It is also easy to add movement to action-based exercises, which is important. (Teacher #86, Grades 3–9, Upper secondary school)

Besides learning the foreign language, some teachers specified that action-based methods improve students' interactions skills. The second most common reason according to the teachers was “learning by doing” (n=32, 33%). By being involved in the activities, it makes students become engaged as active agents in their own learning:

Different methods bring nice variety to teaching. I think learning becomes more efficient when students do things themselves and produce something themselves. (Teacher #99, Adult education)

Many teachers mentioned that action-based techniques motivate students (n=28, 29%). They bring variety to lessons (n=25, 26%) through different types of activities and thus make teaching more multifaceted:

[Action-based methods] motivate both students and teachers. They support different learners and bring variety to lessons. They support the relationships and trust between students and the students and the teacher once students are familiar with the activities. (Teacher #25, Grades 3–6)

Teachers elaborated on the use of action-based methods by commenting that as they bring joy and action in the class, they liven up lessons (n=25, 26%) and even improve the classroom atmosphere. According to the teachers, action-based methods are fun and meaningful (n=18, 19%) for the students. Lessons do not feel like learning situations but playing. Six of the respondents mentioned that action-based methods are not only fun for students but also for teachers.

I use [action-based methods] in nearly all the lessons because they help in learning and memorizing vocabulary and language structures. Students develop courage and get plenty of practice; all their senses are activated. Students don't get bored, they have fun, and they learn together. It leaves a memory trace when we fool around and even "go overboard," students can choose and influence what we do. (Teacher #42, Grades 3–6)

Another reason for using action-based methods was that they bring about important oral practice (n=24, 25%). Action-based activities provide opportunities to create authentic language use situations and, thus, bring learning closer to students' life. Using role-plays, for example, enabled the creation of situations that simulate natural language use. They made things more concrete for students and engaged feelings. Several teachers spelled out that action-based methods are good because they make students "get off their seats" and move physically (n=8, 8%), thus keeping them more alert both mentally and physically. Some felt that the integration of movement and tasks helped students more easily memorize content. Many teachers mentioned that they use action-based methods more often or more regularly with younger students.

Some teachers mentioned that using action-based methods allows differentiation (n=8, 8%), either up or down, as students can participate at different levels according to their own skills. Some of the teachers explained that using action-based methods enabled the use of creativity (n=9, 9%). Some less often specified reasons were that action-based activities give structure to lessons (n=7) and work as necessary breaks (n=4). Only two of the teachers mentioned that the core curriculum (FNBE, 2016) requires the use of drama- or other action-based activities and that they are well suited for the improvement and practice of transversal competences (21<sup>st</sup>-century competences).

#### *Impediments to using action-based methods in teaching*

Those teachers who did not use drama- or other action-based activities at all or used them rarely shared different reasons for their lack of use (n=34). The most common reason was that the teachers felt that they did not know how to use them and they needed training in such methods (n=18, 53% of those respondents who did not use them regularly or did not use at all).

I have not familiarized myself with drama- and action-based methods in teaching and it feels like there is no time now. It feels like these methods are often associated with the elementary and lower secondary school levels, and not so much the upper secondary level. (Teacher #73, Upper secondary school)

Although in the quote above the teacher felt that she did not have time for educating herself about these methods, most of the respondents expressed interest in participating in in-service training geared towards action-based teaching methods. Some hoped that they would have a

colleague whose help they could rely on. Some wished for a material bank that would make it easier to know what activities to use with different kinds of topics.

The second most common reason was a lack of time (n=11, 32%). These teachers felt that there is so much content especially at the upper secondary school level and the pace with older students is much faster so there is no time for action-based methods even if they are effective.

In upper secondary school, the scope of course content is very large and there is limited time. Drama- and action-based tasks take more time even though they are effective for learning. I would likely use them more than now if I had managed to get into an in-service course that deals with them. Such courses are rare. (Teacher #70, Upper secondary school)

Even many of those teachers who used the action-based methods regularly said that they used them more at the lower school levels. Several teachers (n=8, 24%) found their student groups either too small or too large for drama- and other action-based activities and thus did not use them in their teaching. Some complained that they did not have suitable space for such activities. Some (n=7, 21%) claimed that even if they would themselves like to use action-based methods, their students would find them too playful and childish and would not like to participate. These teachers felt that their students liked to study from the textbook and complete book-based exercises.

#### *Sources of ideas for action-based teaching methods*

We also wanted to know where teachers found the ideas for action-based activities. Textbooks or teacher guides were mentioned as a good source of dialogues for pair work or for dramatized reading of texts (n=43, 45% of regular users). The Internet with different social media groups (e.g., Facebook, Pinterest) geared to teachers of specific languages was a popular source for finding activities for lessons (n=39, 41%).

[I find ideas] from Facebook groups and different webpages related to teaching, textbooks and other books geared to my field, from colleagues and trainings. (Teacher #86, Grades 3–9, Upper secondary school)

However, teachers' own creativity was almost as popular a source for action-based activities as the Internet. It was evident that many of the teachers really enjoy being creative and putting in time to make their own material (n=35, 36%). Sometimes it was because there was little ready-made published material, as this teacher explains:

I usually make up everything on my own because in my subject [Latin] there is little ready-made material from the publishers. The exercises in the textbooks are not very activating so I gladly modify them. Before my university years, I did theatre as a hobby for many years so drama and improvisation are very natural working methods for me. I am not afraid to try things out or make them up. (Teacher #49, Grades 7–9, Upper secondary school, adult education)

About a third of the teachers (n=34) who used action-based methods regularly said that they get their ideas from their colleagues while a quarter of the teachers (n=23) said that they have received ideas for action-based methods from in-service teacher trainings. Five teachers said they

sometimes get ideas from their students. Only two teachers mentioned that they had gotten ideas for action-based teaching methods during initial teacher education.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This study aimed to find out how and how often teachers use drama- and other action-based methods in their language classes in Finland (if at all), how they define them, and how they perceive the benefits or impediments to their use. Although most of the respondents used some form of action-based methods in their lessons regularly (at least weekly), there were differences in what they considered these methods to be. Most teachers did not have clear definitions for what action-based or drama-based activities are and many defined them by the activities they used. In general, the teachers described them more often by involving some action or movement rather than, for example, being project work with student interaction and problem-solving (cf. Grosu, 2019; Piccardo & North, 2019). In fact, most of the activities used were quite simple word games involving action and even some form of competition. These types of activities are particularly suitable for lower levels of language competence, active breaks from sitting down, and for engaging learners (Hwang et al., 2020). The second most common activity was role-plays. Since these can be modified for different levels of language proficiency, they are well suited at all school levels and for even more advanced real-life language use. Any activities and tasks that provide situations that are related to natural language use are beneficial for students (Council of Europe, 2018; van Lier, 2007).

The most common reasons given for using action-based methods were that they improve student learning and engage students with learning by doing. Some prior studies have also shown that action-based methods improve student learning (Alpar, 2013) but there is need for more comparative studies. In this study, action-based methods were found to be motivating and fun, which is in agreement with findings in earlier studies (e.g., Salas Alvarado, 2017; Sirisrimangkon, 2018). These methods were also found to liven up lessons, add variety to teaching methods, and incorporate necessary oral language practice. These are all essential factors in language classes so that learners can be engaged in interactive tasks both emotionally and playfully (Winston, 2011).

The impediments to using action-based methods in teaching revealed that many teachers would need specific training in using these methods before they develop the courage and confidence to use them. Prior studies have also emphasized the need for initial training (Toksun, 2017) and even on-going support so that teachers gain self-efficacy to implement these activities in class (Stanton et al., 2018). The vast variety of different action-based methods makes it possible to find suitable activities for any class size, small or large, or in confined spaces. However, this requires that teachers are knowledgeable about different methods and have access to training to try them out in practice (Hişmanoğlu & Çolak, 2019). A clear majority of our respondents were already using action-based methods to some extent and believe that they have a positive impact on classroom atmosphere and student skills. What they wish for most is additional training and support to help them develop their ideas.

Concerns about the large amount of course content particularly in upper secondary education are real. There is pressure on teachers to cover all the material in the textbooks so that

students get maximum input and practice for the matriculation exams looming at the end of upper secondary school in Finland (<https://www.ylioppilastutkinto.fi/en/>). So far there is no matriculation exam for spoken language as the exam covers vocabulary, structure, written production, and listening and reading comprehension. However, plans are being made for an oral component. There is need for current research on the benefits of action-based methods for language learning—including different language skills—so that teachers could make more informed decisions about incorporating them into their lessons.

Although a majority of the teachers mentioned that textbooks were a source of ideas for action- and drama-based methods, they nevertheless felt that textbook activities were mainly limited to dialogues. According to the findings, most teachers who used action-based methods went beyond the textbook and took time to find ideas from the Internet or make up activities on their own. Thus, many of the teachers seemed very resourceful and interested in designing such activities for their students that involved movement and action in creative language use and not merely dialogue. However, teachers should not be expected to always have to make their own material and games for these methods. Textbook authors and publishers should do their part to assist teachers in this process. Based on our findings, it seems clear that there is need for more diverse and more involved activities that give students opportunities to practice 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills in project-type team work (Piccardo & North, 2019). Such larger project work would tie a foreign language into other subjects and transversal competence areas (FNAE, 2020). If such tasks and activities were incorporated into teachers' material and textbooks at different levels, including upper secondary school and adult education, teachers could more easily make use of them, despite their busy schedules.

The limitations of our study include that our sample was self-selected. Future research might use different sampling methods to gain a clearer picture of teachers' perceptions and use of action-based methods in language teaching. It would be important to carry out field studies with lesson observations to see if teachers' attitudes to methods correspond to those actually used in lessons (cf. Othman & Kiely, 2016). In order to get wider generalizability of the findings, it would require a cross-cultural questionnaire or observation study in different countries.

What the findings of this study show clearly is that drama- and other action-based techniques should be systematically taught during initial teacher education so that every language teacher would have some experience of and self-efficacy for using at least simple action-based activities such as ice-breakers, transitions, or refreshers in lessons. However, as initial teacher education for language teachers is limited in time and scope, there should be regular in-service training available for all language teachers so that they can update and strengthen their skills for effective teaching—and integrate these kinds of creative methods in more complex tasks (FNBE, 2016). As part of that training, teachers need to be convinced of the efficacy of these methods, in order to challenge the idea that they “don't have time” to use them. Teachers would also benefit from more extensive collaboration among colleagues. There is likely motivation for it, but schools should provide teachers with paid planning time for sharing best practices.



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